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AUTHOR Villadsen, Alice W.
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ABSTRACT

The study discussed in this paper investigated the problems that women in educational administration face as they try to balance career and home responsibilities. A survey was taken of 335 women administrators in 56 public colleges and universities in 5 southern states. Twenty women of the 8 percent who responded were interviewed. Results showed that the women administrators voiced four prerequisites for effective operation of their daily schedules: (1) keeping work and home separate by compartmentalizing; (2) delegating responsibilities; (3) using escape devices when duties become overwhelming; and (4) simplifying their lives. Also discussed are the four important activities women administrators felt necessary to delete from their schedules: (1) publishing; (2) pursuing graduate studies; (3) developing personal friendships; and (4) taking family vacations. The paper concludes that once women become more established in educational administration, they can become less preoccupied with performing their duties with such intensity. (Author/LD)

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THE BALANCING ACT OF WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS: HOME AND CAREER

ALICE W. VILLADSEN

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Dr. Alice W. Villadsen
The University of Alabama
IHERS
P. O. Box 6293
University, AL 35486

THE BALANCING ACT OF WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS: HOME AND CAREER

The problems faced by women educational administrators who are the mothers of families are immense. Women somehow must find the energy and the justification for maintaining the delicate balance between mother and manager, wife and administrator, housekeeper and professional woman. In the world of scholarly research, little attention has been devoted to the dilemma of these managerial women in education generally and in higher education specifically or to the alternative actions available to them.

METHODOLOGY/DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

In an attempt to investigate the delicate balance between home and career responsibilities of women in higher education administration, I surveyed 335 women administrators (here considered to be women reporting to presidents or vice-presidents) in 56 public four-year colleges and universities in five Southern states. Eighty percent of the women responded by returning initial questionnaires. Based upon the descriptions of women in administration in Southern institutions available from the questionnaire research, a selection committee named 20 respondents for me to interview. Those 20 women were or had been married, were the mothers of at least one child younger than 18, and held administrative positions in which they reported to presidents or vice presidents of their institutions. Included in the 20 women interviewed were single parents, minority women, and mothers of pre-school children. Eighteen of the 20 women

were interviewed on their respectives campuses while two women were interviewed by telephone. All were asked 50 questions relating to balancing home and career responsibilities.

Statistics generated through the initial phase of research reflected the current marital and family status of the Southern woman administrator. Only 25% of the population of 263 women administrators had never married; almost 50% of the women were within a first marriage; and the remaining 25% were either remarried, divorced, or widowed. Based upon these statistics, it would seem that the old stereotype of the female academician as spinster is incorrect. Also, the study revealed that 60% of the women surveyed were mothers. Of the mothers responding, 67% had one or two children while 14% of the mothers had four or five children.

Among the 20 women interviewed, 17 were married or remarried, two were divorced, and one was widowed. All of the 20 were mothers of at least one child younger than 18 years.

IMPERATIVES FOR BALANCE

As a result of those interviews, certain common imperatives surfaced. The administrative women voiced four requisities for the effective operations of their hectic schedules. The imperatives were (1) compartmentalization, (2) delegation, (3) escape, and (4) simplification.

Compartmentalization:

Although Henning and Jardim (1977) chastised women for their tendencies to compartmentalize their lives rather than

merge home and career in the typical male fashion, the 20 women interviewed found compartmentalization essential. The 20 attempted to keep work from infringing on home time, and vice versa.

Said one mother of two:

> I am "at work" between eight and five, essentially. Once I'm home during their waking hours, I try not to think, act, talk about work, except in areas in which they have some interest. Anything that I do at home relative to work is after they go to bed.

Another expressed her separation in this way:

> Home is home except when those immediate people who constitute my home environment are not present.

Several women stated that because of commuting time - from home to work and back again - they were able to prepare themselves for the transition between their two worlds.

Delegation:

Organization becomes the key for women who combine the roles of mother and professional. Basic to organization is delegation - to husbands, children, extended family members, household helpers, sitters, professional subordinates. Although 14 of the 20 women stated that they continued to take the major responsibility for organizing household management, almost all had used others in the actual running of the house. Half of the respondents hired full-time maids. Husbands were described as "supportive," assuming many duties in the home. Children pitched in and helped - in caring for younger siblings and in maintaining the household chores. Extended family members - grandmothers particularly - stepped in during crises. These

support systems were described as essential in the lives of administrative women with families.

Escape:

The women found that there were times when their dual responsibilities became overwhelming. When they felt "caught in the clutch," they depended on certain escape mechanisms to enable them to cope with the complexities of their existence.

Numerous physical activities were named as escape devices - from gardening to jogging to banging out Beethoven on the piano. Psychological respite was described as necessary by several women. One said, "Sometimes it helps to walk - usually with my daughter. If I can just not think of anything and can look at the water and the flowers, it helps a great deal."

Hobbies offered escape for 17 of the 20 women interviewed. Community theatre, gourmet cooking, photography, and painting were a few of the essential outlets named. Leisure reading provided escape for 16 interviewees.

One woman commented on her reading habits by saying:

> I read trash. Pure, unadulterated trash. It is an escape for me. When I go on trips, I keep a novel with me. Here in the office, I keep a novel hidden in the drawer all the time, way in the back of the drawer. Some days I simply need to pull it out and indulge myself for a while. My nail polish and my novels I always have.

Simplification:

Women in administration simplify their lives so that they may devote the necessary time to those activities which they

consider essential. Lowering housekeeping standards is a typical simplification procedure. One woman said this:

> Anyone who thinks that she can have a successful career and keep a spotless house and cook elaborate meals is heading for an early grave. When I was a full-time housewife before our child was born, I cooked all my cookies from scratch, mopped and waxed the floors weekly--everything was lovely. When the baby came, then I lowered the standards of my housekeeping and got more involved in child care. And as I went back to school, then back to work, the house just slipped, slipped, slipped--and now sometimes we'll go a week without a bed being made, our meals sometimes consist of opening a couple of cans and dumping them in a boiler, and I find that we are just as healthy, just as happy. You just have to decide that having a happy, healthy family is more important than having spotless house.

Simplification also involves the development of a new and different mind-set evident in the lives of the 20 women interviewed. The recognition of the value of time was a given, especially time devoted to nurturing good relationships with children. Several women noted that they had abandoned the search for advancement to higher level positions which might involve a relocation until their children were less dependent or older. Others had reduced the amount of time spent on community service and club work.

DELETIONS FOR MAINTAINING BALANCE

Although most women indicated that simplification of their lives was an important ingredient in maintaining a balance between career and home responsibilities, several items were deleted which they saw as being important to the success of their careers. These omissions included (1) publishing, (2) pursuing graduate studies, (3) the development and maintenance of close personal friendships, and (4) family vacations.

Publishing:

Writing for publication, an area where some research has indicated that women fall short of the productivity of men, was seen by seven respondents as an activity to which they felt they devoted sufficient time. However, the remaining women said that this was one area of their professional responsibilities which they had laid aside in order to fulfill dual responsibilities at home and on the job. Said one respondent, "The writing and publishing is often put on the back burner. Right now I have two pieces that I need to work on." Another woman said, "I find that there is a tremendous strain on my time because what I end up having to do in order to write is to burn the midnight oil at home."

Continuing Education:

A number of respondents had completed a terminal degree, but several had not completed graduate training. Among those, some said that they could not manage doctoral programs because of family considerations. A respondent expressed her feelings about continuing her schooling and raising a family.

> Until my children are grown, I'm not going back to school. I've done that. It got to the point before my master's degree was finished that I thought my children were saying, "I don't ever want to go to college." They saw me as harried, and they attributed all of my stress to the fact that I was going to college. It wasn't. I was stressed because I was working. I was a mother and a housewife and a lover and all of those things...plus a student. And that was too much. I would love to get my doctorate. But it's just one of those decisions that I've had to make.

Friendships:

Seventeen of the 20 women said that they did not have

enough time to devote to the development and maintenance of good friendships. One woman stated, "I feel a lack in that area. I don't have time to develop close personal relationships with friends." However, a different philosophy was given by a divorcee based upon her experiences as a career woman and as a suburban housewife.

> I have been fortunate in that I spent years in which I was a suburban housewife. I had no children, and I taught school. I didn't teach every year; my husband really didn't want me to work, and I'd quit periodically. I'd play golf and bridge and get bored and go back to teaching. I'm one of the few people who realize what a luxury it is to get up in the morning and go to a job where your presence is important and you're accomplishing something. To me that's a great luxury. Time for friends...I don't miss.

None seemed to miss the casual friendships which often develop among women who do not work outside of the home; however, women expressed a sadness that they were unable to spend time with close friends.

Vacations:

Only six respondents said that they generally took vacations with their families or went alone. The other 14 said that they had been unable to work out appropriate vacation plans because of work schedules. Several women said that they often took long weekends with their families but that it was especially difficult to be away from their demanding careers for weeks at a time. Also, some said that they combined professional meetings with family vacations, sandwiching in a few days either before or after the meeting for sightseeing and relaxing. However, on the whole, the women admitted to

some feelings of frustration that their lives were too full to allow for vacation time.

CONCLUSION

The imperatives which women in administration hold--compartmentalization, delegation, escape, and simplification--enable them to maintain equilibrium within the complexity of home and career responsibilities. Since women, perhaps more so than men, feel compelled to maintain exceptionally high performance standards in order to be excemplary in their new found careers, certain activities are eliminated. Typically, these include writing for publication, pursuing a terminal degree, taking adequate vacation time, and spending the necessary time to make and maintain personal friendships. Perhaps once women become more established within higher educational administration, they can become less preoccupied with performing their duties with such intensity. Then they may be able to relax the stringent requirements they have placed upon themselves and enjoy tangential but life enhancing activities.